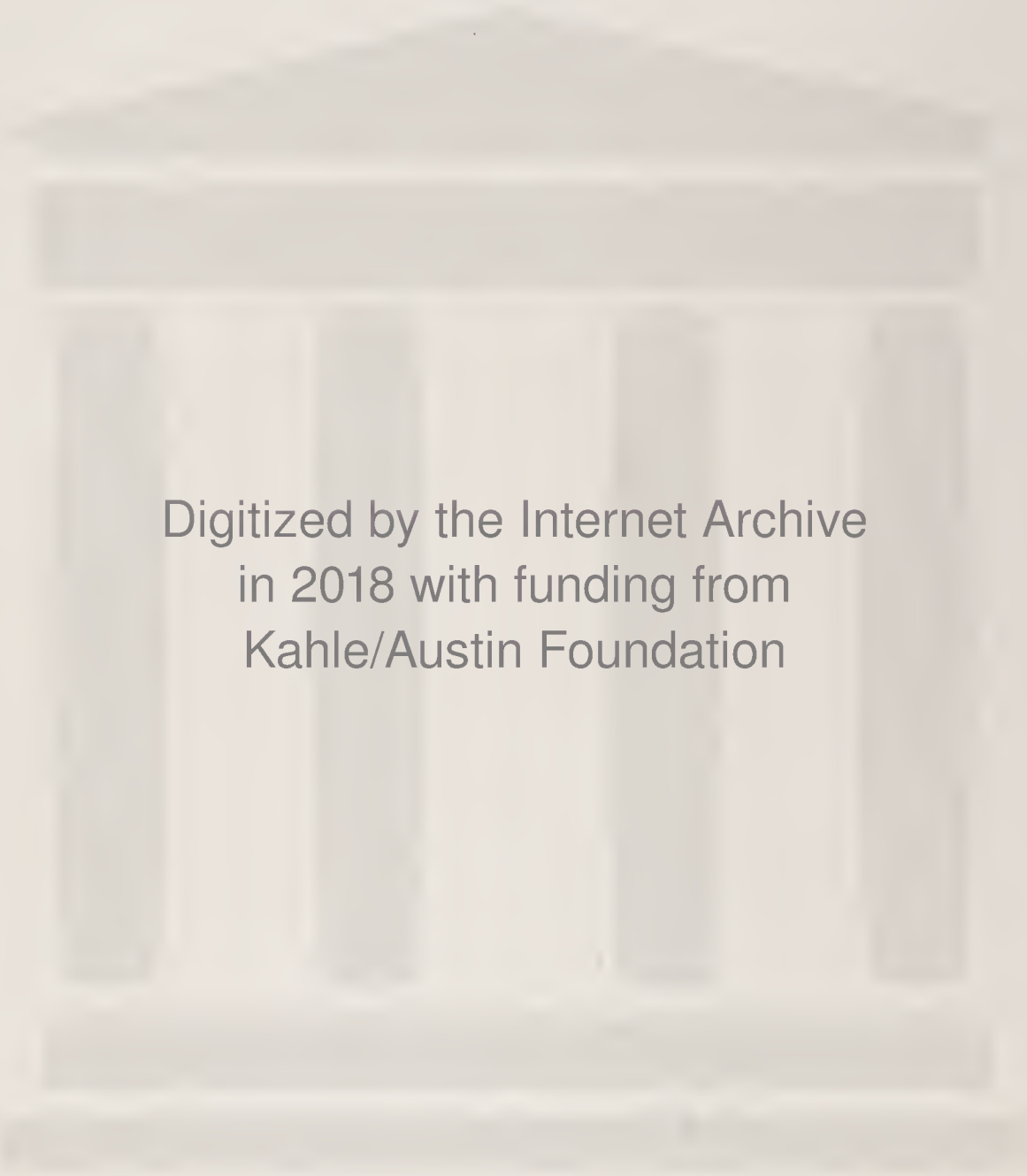


ALL ABOUT HAMSTERS



by Kay Ragland



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Hamster As A Pet	3
Feeding Your Hamster	8
Water	13
Housing The Hamster	14
Training	21
Selecting A Hamster	26
Breeding	28
Ailments And Treatments	31
Displays And Shows	32
Summary	32

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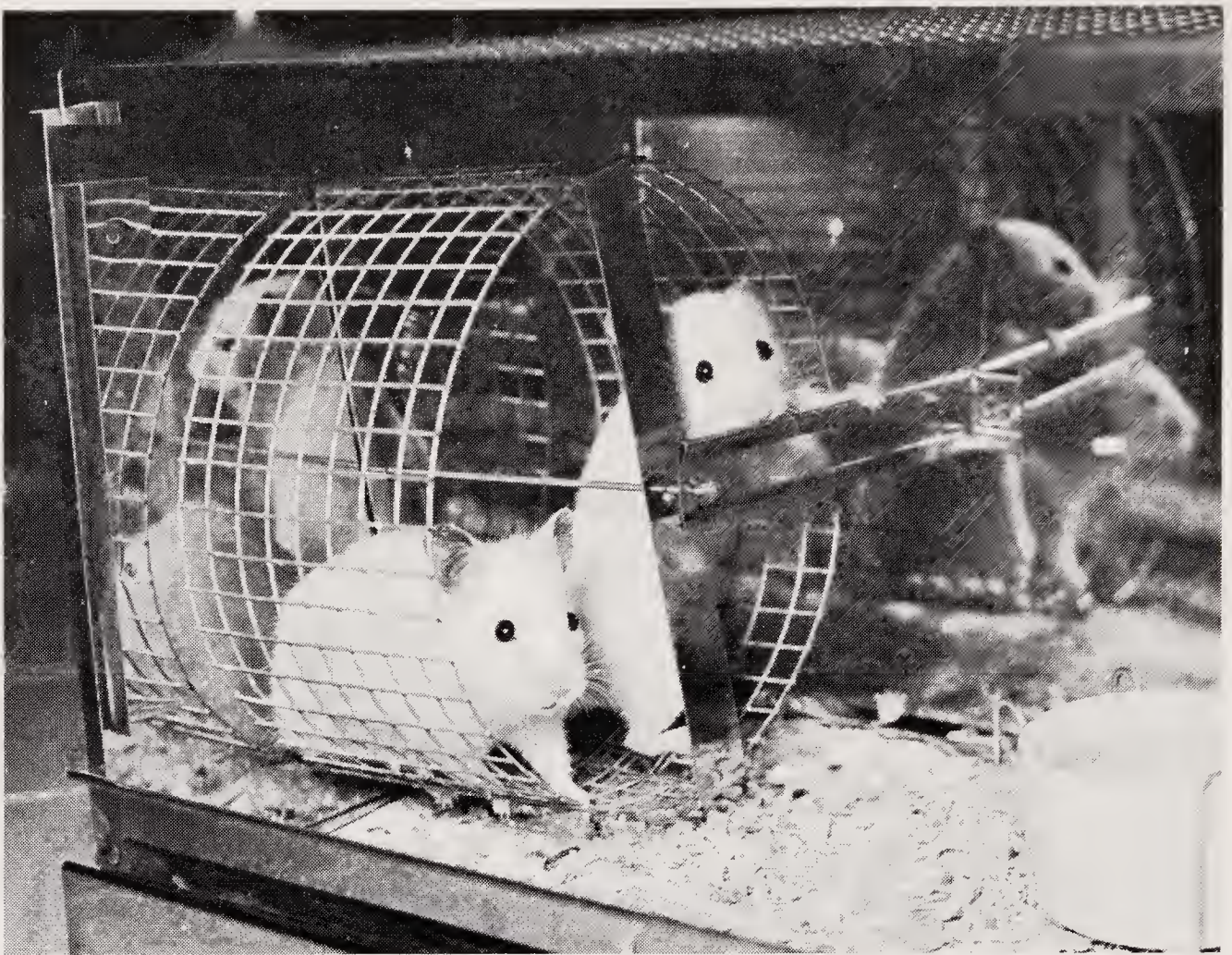
This close-up of a beautiful golden hamster. Note his alert appearance! This photo, taken in the dark with a strobe light, shows the hamster foraging for food on this lettuce leaf.

THE HAMSTER AS A PET

“Mama, I want a hamster”—how many a youngster has expressed this desire, for instinctively he knows what an ideal pet this little creature can be. And in a home that cannot accommodate other types of pets for any variety of reasons, this animal is ideal, being odorless and extremely clean, taking up very little space, easy and inexpensive to feed, having few ailments, noiseless—what else could be asked of any such tiny animal that will give so much pleasure?

Yet the hamster as we now know it in most petshops is a newcomer to the pet field. Prior to 1930 it was unknown in the domesticated form. Since its introduction as a domestic animal, its popularity has skyrocketed and thousands of persons, both young and old, have this beautiful golden-brown pet. It is one of the fastest reproducing animals known today.

The background of the hamster is unusual. Some species of hamsters have been a source of trouble to farmers throughout Europe,



A pair of hamsters playing in an exercise wheel. These are white hamsters and may easily be mistaken for mice or rats.

parts of Asia Minor and China, because they are untamable, fierce creatures, reaching a foot in length, that burrowed into the fields, eating the grain and hoarding whatever they carry off to their storage tunnels. All hamster species have the large elastic pouches for carrying food. One hamster can store up to one hundred pounds for winter use, thus their unpopularity is well-deserved. Native hamsters are unsatisfactory, even for laboratory work.

One day early in 1930 a Professor Aharoni, Department of Zoology, Hebrew University, located in Jerusalem, was collecting and studying native wild life and animals in the open fields near a small town of Aleppo, Syria. These fields were heavily impregnated with hamster burrows, each burrow looking exactly like the next one. Having completed his task early and having some extra time, Prof. Aharoni decided to explore one of the burrows. He selected one at random and started to dig. On and on he turned up the burrow until, eight feet along, he came upon a hamster—and what a hamster it turned out to be! It proved to be a mother with young, a beautiful golden-brown creature, small in size, which he recognized as a

golden hamster, the first one found in a considerable time. Delighted with his find, he immediately placed the mother and her 12 young into a cage and took them back with him to the Hebrew University. One by one the babies died, until finally only one male and two females remained. Up to this time hamsters had not been kept in captivity and not much was known about their care. Several months later, one of the females gave birth, these young being the first born in captivity. Other births occurred and soon there were quite a few youngsters, all descendents from the original female. Other universities and even laboratories made inquiries, as well as personal visits, to the Hebrew University, mainly interested in one thing. Would these new hamsters prove valuable not only as a pet, but as a laboratory animal? All wanted some of these golden hamsters and finally, in 1931, two pairs were sent to England, a few to France, then several years later a shipment was received at the U.S. Public Health Service at Carville, La. It is interesting to note that from this find of Prof. Aharoni of one mother and her young, that there are now literally millions of hamsters to be found in homes, schools, pet shops and laboratories

A front view of a hamster with loaded cheek pouches.





Hamsters love to make nests for sleeping and for hiding their food caches.

today. It is with this golden Syrian hamster (*Mesocricetus auratus*) the pet in the home, his care and maintenance, that we are concerned.

This hamster is a clean and odorless animal, easily trained. It has a golden-brown, dense, shiny fur with slight tinges of grey on the undercoat, with a white or light gray belly roughly 6 inches long, and weighing about four ounces. As the animal gets older, the coloration gets darker. Small areas of dark brown appear on the cheeks and a dark band spans the chest from side to side, often as an unbroken line. Tails are very short, often appearing as mere stumps and the body is stocky with short legs. The face is intelligent looking with a pointed nose, broad cheeks, upstanding and wide apart ears and brilliant dark eyes alive with curiosity. An outstanding feature is the cheek pouches that extend from the sides of the mouth down to the shoulder. These pouches allow the hamster to store or hoard not only food bits, but often bedding and, on rare occasions, her young. Incidentally, this hoarding habit is what has given the hamster its name—in German *hamster* means *hoarder*. After it has eaten its fill, it will cram food into the pouches, which stretch to an amazing capacity, taking the food to the storage area for future use. When the pouches are so distended, the hamster looks as if he has a bad case of mumps. To empty the pouches, the hamster puts the paws back of the pouches at the shoulders and with a rubbing motion forward, the food is dislodged.

The storage area selected by the pet hamster should be left alone



With cheek pouches full, this hamster looks like it has goiter, but it has only had a good meal.

as much as possible. In cleaning the cage, try to replace the storage area as you found it, because if you move it around too much, the hamster may try to retain the food continuously in the pouches. Often the regular food dish is used for this hoarding and should this be true with your hamster, put in another dish with the dry food, allowing the first dish to be used as the animal wishes. This hoarding habit comes in very handy should you wish to be away from home for a few days and the food you left is used up, for then the animal can go to the hoard and help himself.

These nearly full-grown hamsters are napping during the daytime. At first glance they look dead . . . but they sleep in the most amazing positions.





Hamsters like sunflower seeds so much they will take them from your fingers.

FEEDING YOUR HAMSTER

Feeding a hamster is an easy and inexpensive job, yet a very important one to maintain a healthy animal. Feeding once a day is sufficient. Feed at a time convenient to have a few extra minutes, in order that you can use this time to train him and coax him into small tricks with bits of food. By feeding at the same time each day, he will gradually look forward to your appearance and will wait at the doorway of his cage. Should you not be on time, he will become anxious and will be seen to peer out seeking you.

All dishes inside the cage, both food and water, should be washed with hot water at least once a week.

General feeding should consist of:

A good pellet-type food, various grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, stale bread, cut fresh grass, dandelions and sunflower seeds.

Taking these foods in order, a **hard pellet** is necessary as a basic food and also to keep the teeth sharp. It should be purchased in small amounts to retain freshness and stored in a covered container. Hamster or rabbit pellets are excellent, and a pound package should last at least a month, the daily ration being half an ounce a day. Don't fill a large dish with pellets, put in a small amount every day and throw out any that remain uneaten.

Grains. Any kind is relished, but especially wheat and oatmeal. Oatmeal being available in most homes makes it a handy food and, of course, we mean RAW oatmeal, not cooked. Just a pinch is sufficient and if given once a week, it will be eaten up at once.

Vegetables, especially leafy ones are ideal. These include lettuce, potatoes or parings from potatoes, carrots, celery, in fact, any vegetable except onions. Cabbage should be given in very limited amounts. Use the vegetables that you are having for your own meals, and remember—*small bits only*. A four ounce animal cannot eat an entire lettuce leaf. Vary the vegetables. One day a bit of lettuce and maybe a potato paring, the next a carrot and celery. No food (except dry hamster pellets) should be left in the cage over 12 hours or until they wilt. Decomposed food is not only bad for the pet, but can create an odor, and make an unsightly cage.

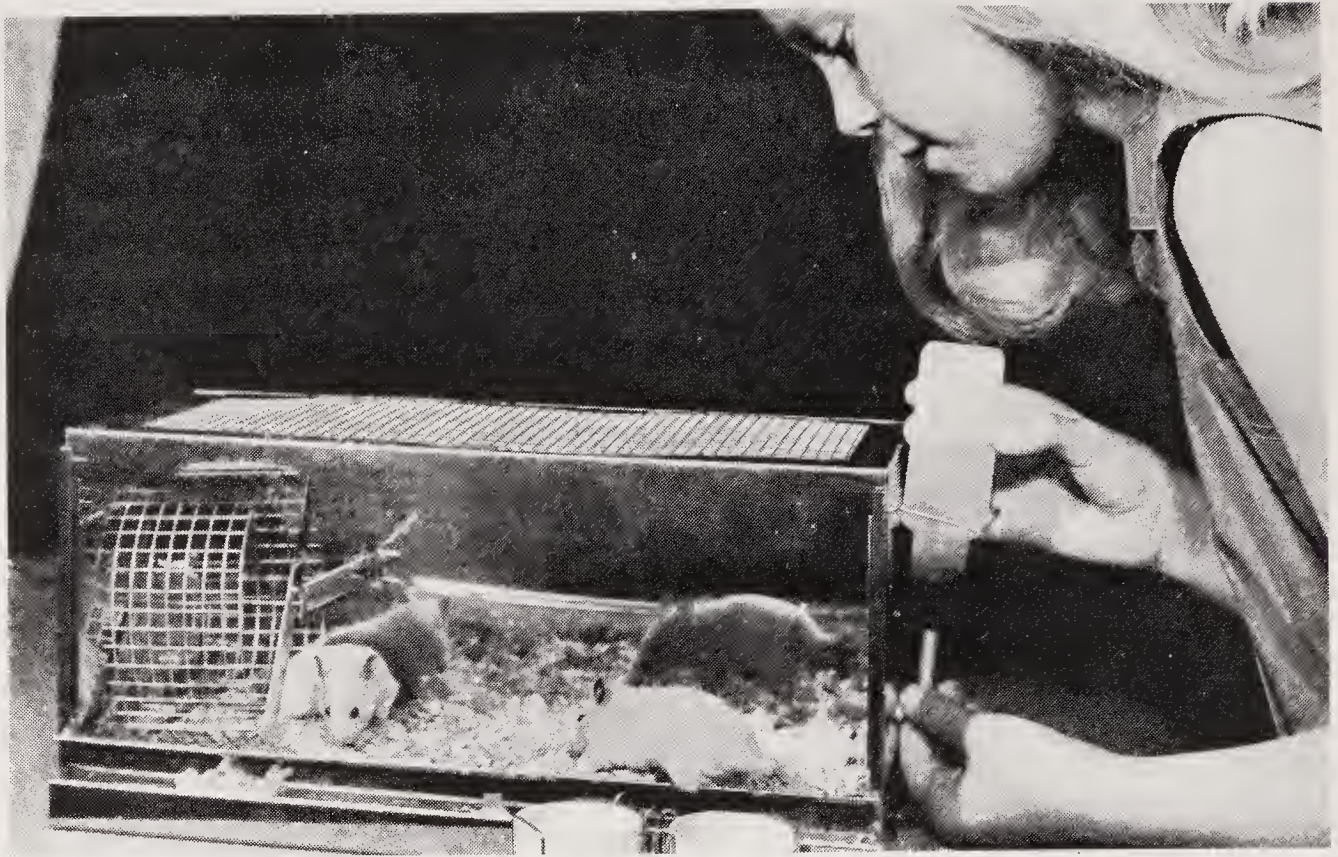
Fruits. Here again any fruit but citrus can be given and enjoyed. Bits of apple, banana, berries, grapes—try them, but only one at a time.

Nuts, especially peanuts make a welcome change to the diet. Shell the nut and put it in the cage. Do not use salted nuts but if this is all that is available, wash and dry them before feeding.

Stale bread in cube size may be given. White, whole wheat, rye, or even raisin may be used. Even corn bread is a treat. It is good to accustom the hamster to bread as it is an excellent way of giving cod-

Side view of a banded hamster eating hamster seeds.





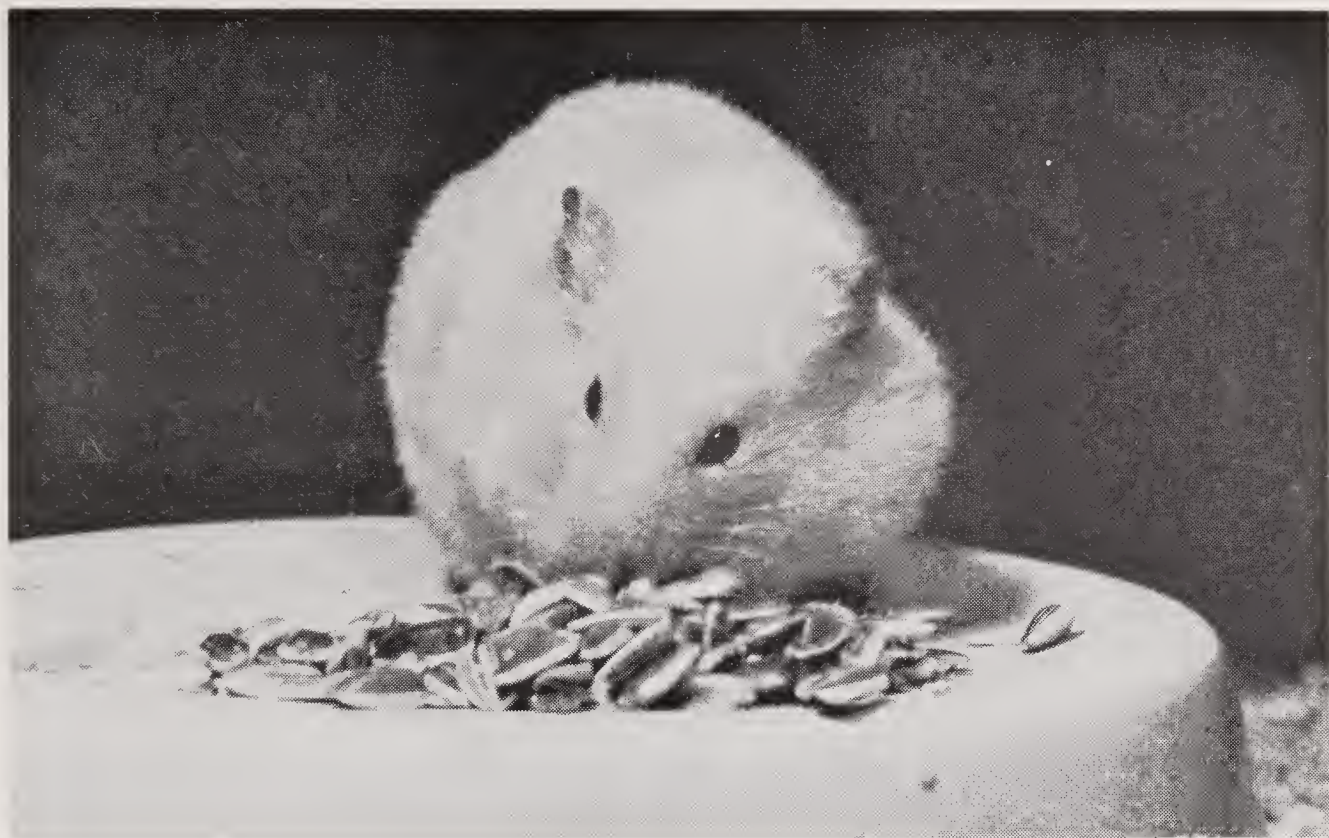
Hamsters need water continuously. A water bottle is the easiest and best way to offer water.

liver oil if necessary. A few drops on the bread which will soak it in is an easy way to administer it.

Should you be out of vegetables or not have small bits available, go out and look for a dandelion or a few blades of green grass. **Sunflower seeds** are welcomed also.

This hamster is eating a bit of apple. Hamsters like changes in their diet, but too many greens or vegetables make loose bowels, so be careful.





Hamsters love to eat sunflower seeds.

It is not necessary to make a chore out of feeding your hamster nor is it necessary to feed both fruits and vegetables every day. Leafy vegetables are more of a necessity and, combined with the pellets, form the ideal diet, with fruits, nuts, and other items mentioned as a treat. Your pet can eat just so much and that is all. He will try to store the balance given to him so check on how much he can eat and feed accordingly.

A neighbor of mine called me over one day and said her hamster wasn't eating. I checked him carefully and could find nothing but a very healthy animal, but she insisted he wasn't eating. A look at his cage disclosed half an apple, several grapes, a stalk of celery, a lettuce leaf, pellets and a gnawed piece of bread. How on earth could such a wee animal eat his fill and the amount he took in show on the over-supply given to him? She was sure he would starve if given only one grape, or a nut, or a small bit of celery or lettuce, plus a small handful of pellets. As for the water dish—it was a quart jar inverted, the kind used to water dogs. Both food and water were old. I finally got the idea thru to her that what she had given one mite of a hamster was the same as sitting her down to dinner with an entire side of beef, peck of potatos, bushel of salad, and gallons of coffee and expecting her to consume it before it spoiled.

There are several other foods that can be added to the diet. I used



A favorite pose while eating is to feed themselves with their front paws.

dog biscuits (the kind for puppies) on occasion, then one day when I ran out of both pellets and dog biscuits, I tried some cat pellets that formed a part of my cat's diet. The hamster ate cat pellets to the last one and since that time, I occasionally add a few for variety. After you train your pet to sit on your hand, you can actually feed him by hand. This is the time to give him the special treats as a reward. At this time do not put the treats in the cage but keep them for special training purposes.

As they are creatures of habit, hamsters should be fed at the same time every day. Since they are most active toward nightfall, this is an excellent time for feeding. Your pet hamster will soon know feeding time and will be waiting for you near the doorway of his cage, and should you be late, he will be anxiously looking and watching for you. Allow him to come out of the cage and eat from the palm of your hand. One of the delights of keeping this animal is to watch him consume the food he wishes, then fill up his cheek pouches and scurry off to hide it with his accumulated hoard. *You cannot overfeed the hamster*, he eats what he wants, then stores the rest for future use.

Always make sure that any perishable food is not allowed to spoil. When vegetables wilt and fruits turn color, they should be removed. This is one good reason why only small bits of perishable food should be given; just enough for one feeding and no more. Should the hamster be hungry in-between feedings, he can always take a few pellets or, in an emergency, go to the hoard.



A properly set up hamster cage with exercise wheel, unspillable feed and water cups, and the proper litter on the bottom. Exceptionally fine hamster litters are available now pre-packaged by the manufacturer.

WATER

Water should be supplied in such a manner as to maintain it in a fresh condition at all times. An open dish has two disadvantages: (1) the water can be contaminated by bits of food falling in and (2) being easily turned over or splashed out with a resultant damp cage.

Hamster cages usually have a water bottle attached. Similar bottles can be purchased at your local pet shop. Hamsters must have access to water at all times.



A stainless steel hamster cage has many advantages. One of them is that the sides reflect light and act as a sort of mirror. A hamster enjoys playing with his image in the mirror.

HOUSING THE HAMSTER

Due to the small size of this pet, there are many ways of providing shelter for your hamster. Some of the cages built by youngsters lacking the money to buy one, are not only practical, but often very handsome in appearance.

There are many hamster cages on the market today and most of them will prove adequate. Standard cages are of metal, resembling some of the bird breeding cages, and are roughly $18 \times 12 \times 12$ inches, with removable bottom for easier cleaning, waterbottle, food dish, and a round wire wheel for exercising. Some may have a corner platform reached by a sloping side, often there is a shelf a couple of inches from the bottom. The price is nominal for a standard cage and makes a good birthday gift for the youngster.

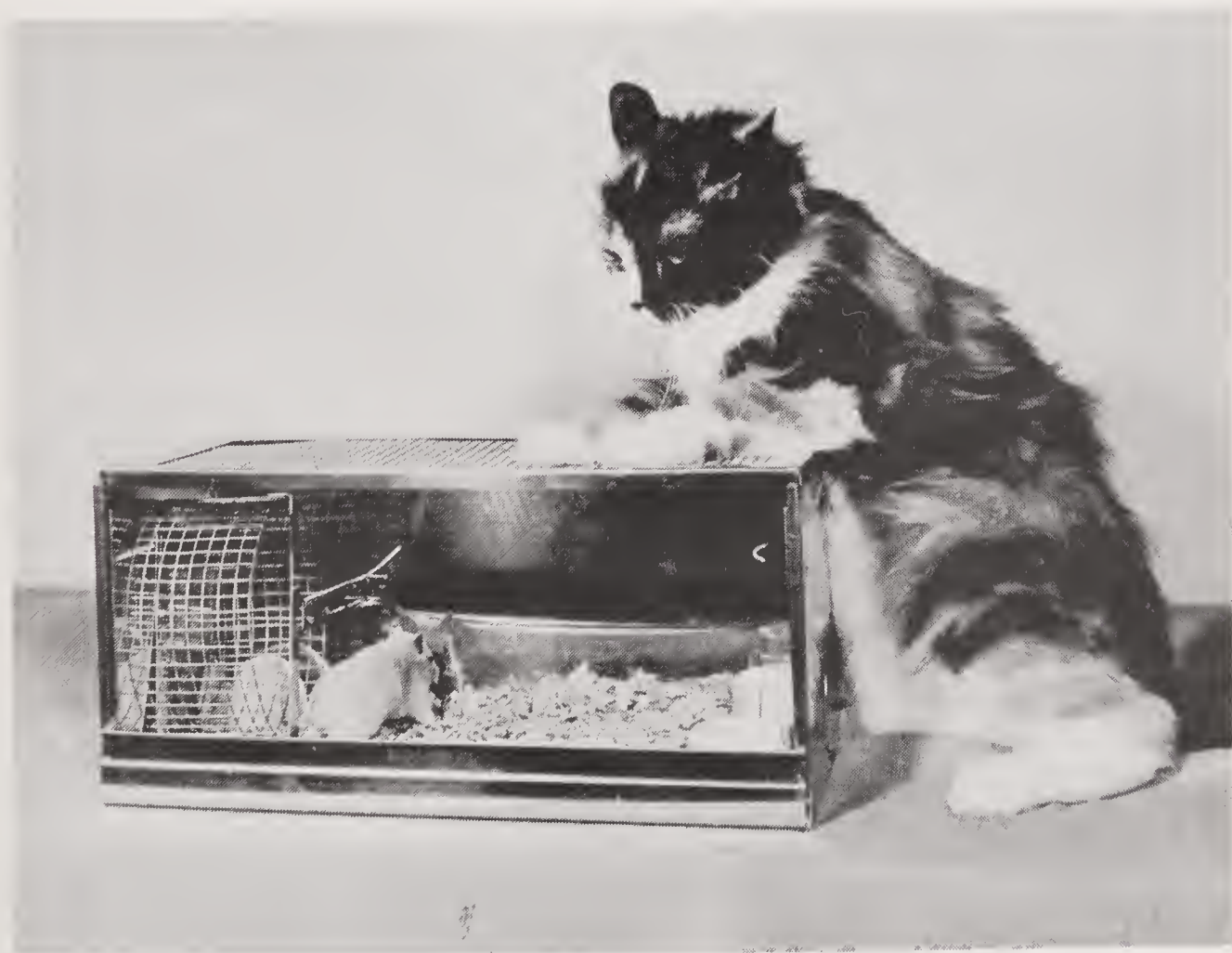
To make a cage is not difficult and I will try to describe some that I have seen which are most practical and easy to clean . . . but it is nearly always cheaper to buy a cage at your pet shop than to make your own.

Remember the hamster is a burrowing animal and soft wood may not retain him, small size though he is. But, should you wish to use a small wooden box, line it with small mesh wire or carpenter cloth.

In general, the size should be about that of the standard hamster cages—18 × 12 × 12 inches. It can be of various shapes but the overall area should be as closely to the standard cage as possible. It can be made of wood, metal, wood and glass, wire meshing—you choose a material and start from there. Even an abandoned bird cage if reinforced with wire mesh will be excellent for it already has a removable bottom. Even though the wires seem close together, a hamster can get thru an opening that seems almost impossible, because he hides a very small body under very thick fur.

Get a small wooden box. Remove one end and one side. Place some type of small square post at the corner where the two sides have been removed. The side that has been removed is to be covered with wire mesh firmly tacked into place. The end section is to be made as a folding door by using a frame of wood about one inch wide. To this is attached wire mesh and again firmly tacked with no open ends. This

Hamsters attract cats. Cats eat hamsters. Cages keep cats from hamsters.





Hamsters can learn to make friends with many different types of animals, but you have to teach cats when they are very young that hamsters are not mice!

wire door is to be hinged to the bottom of the box with a lock at the top to prevent escape of the animal. The frame must fit into the box. A pan 1 inch high of the same size as the inside of the cage can be inserted into the box and removed for cleaning.

For variation, glass may be used on one side or one side of glass and one of mesh (top and bottom being wood), or both sides glass with a wire mesh door.

Before planning the cage, it might be well to look around and determine just where you will keep the cage in the house. If in a corner area, a wooden side and back where it fits the corner would probably be best. If in an open area then one side only should be covered.

An aquarium can be used, although it may be hard to keep clean unless some type of pan is inserted into the bottom which can easily be removed for cleaning.

A clever cage was made by a local youngster using two rectangular baking pans $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, 8 inches wide and 15 inches long. He obtained heavy wire mesh and strands of easily bent wire. The wire

mesh was shaped to fit tightly into one of the pans, that is 8 inches wide, 15 inches long, and he made it 12 inches high. He took the strands of wire and ran them across the bottom of the pan and up to the mesh on all sides, cutting the ends one inch longer, then inserting this inch into the mesh and bringing it thru to the inside where it was bent to hold. Thus he made a solid covered cage. Next he placed the other four sides of the mesh into the second pan which was the bottom, but instead of wiring this pan into place, he used wire clips which were secured to the mesh and then run under the bottom pan for holding. This cage could not be picked up but when it was time to clean, he merely unclipped the mesh and raised it from the bottom pan.

Practically any kind of container can be used, allowing for the gnawing habit of the hamster. A large rat cage (used for white rats), can be used. It should be made so it can be easily cleaned and that the animal can have sufficient room. It should be easy to reach into for feeding or handling the hamster.

Now you have a home for your pet—what else will he need?

A cage full of champagne hamsters with one banded hamster. No matter how large a cage you give them, the hamsters always bunch up.





Dogs are not natural enemies of hamsters, but hounds often hunt mice and rats and they don't know the difference between a hamster and a mouse . . . so teach your pet dog not to molest your pet hamster or he might break the cage in his eagerness to get to the pet rodent.

First of all, the bottom must have a covering of wood shavings or litter. In an emergency, shredded paper can be used.

The water bottle is attached either inside or outside the cage, depending on what type is used.

Feed dishes have already been mentioned.

For play, a wire wheel will provide hours of amusement, both to the hamster and to you. He will run and run on the little wheel which provides him the necessary exercise. He may also use this wheel to sleep on and will stretch out front and back legs and relax.

All animals, this one being no exception, like to have a place of their own. Although you may allow him to run outside a bit, and carry him around on your shoulder or in your hands, his cage is his own domain. Care should always be taken to put the water bottle in the same place, the food dish in the same place, and if he is reluctant to leave the cage at any time, respect his wishes and leave him alone.

Your pet hamster can take the usual house temperature although if under 55° the adult hamster may go into a state of hibernation. The cage must not be in any draft and at night a soft cloth should be placed over the cage. When he is too cold, he will curl up and sleep until it gets warm enough.

A clean piece of wood will be used for exercising his teeth and

should be provided for this purpose, otherwise he may decide to chew on the cage, metal or not.

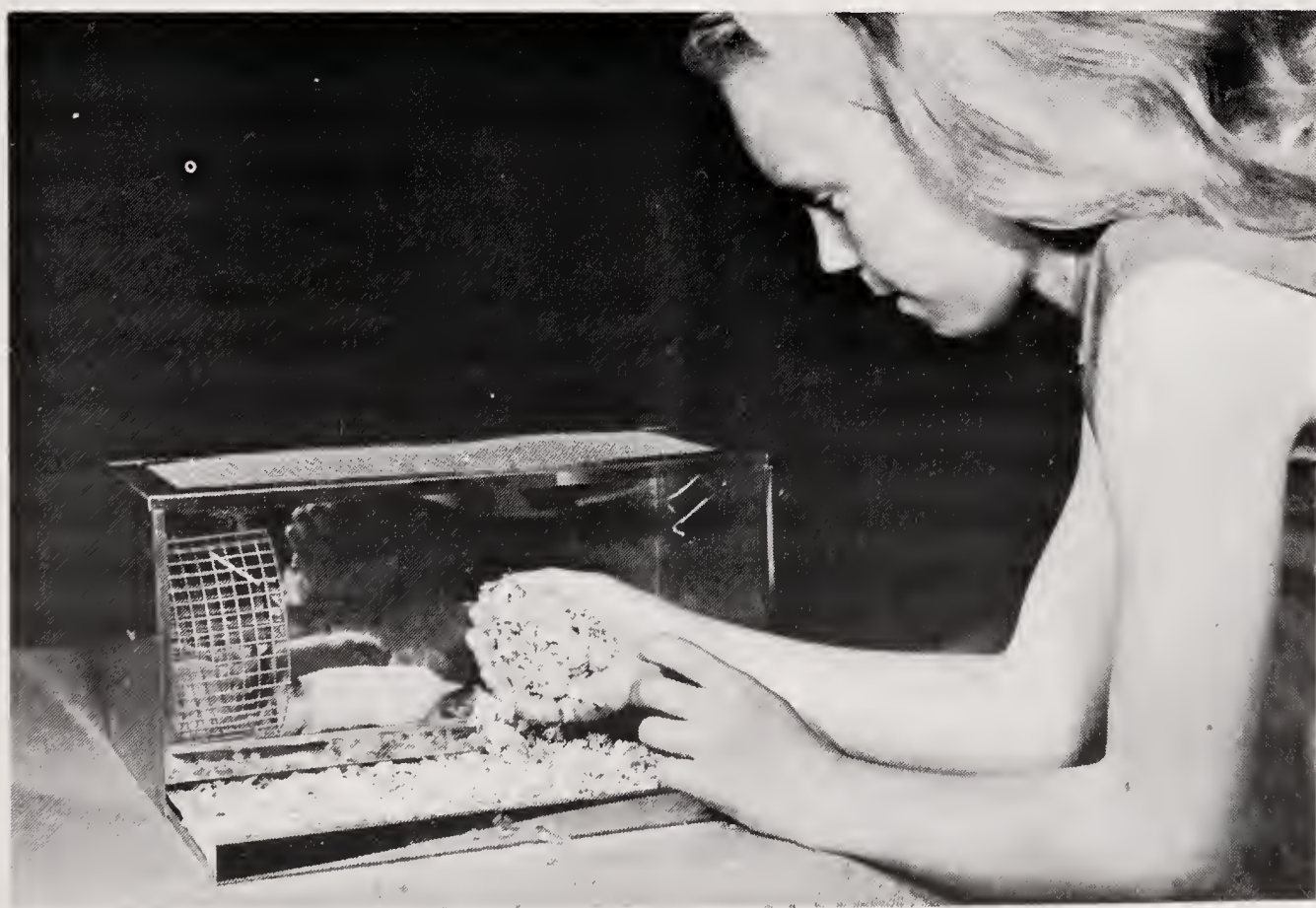
Common sense plays a part in care of any animal—a hamster can be pampered to death as well as neglected. If he is placed in the sun during very hot days, he will suffer from the heat, especially if his cage has too much glass.

Cleanliness is also a must—the cage should have a good cleaning at least once a week at which time all glass dishes and containers must be washed in hot water and thoroughly dried before putting in more food. The litter should be thrown out (making very sure whatever food has been stored is replaced, or at least the major part of it) and fresh litter used. A large bag of hamster litter can be purchased from your local pet store. It is low in cost and lasts many months.

Occasionally, take the hamster out and put him into another container while you hang his cage in the sun after a good cleaning. At this time use a brush and gently clean all the wire. Should there be any accumulation of either food or excrement, wash it off and dry thoroughly. This sun treatment will prevent rust and assure complete drying, besides sterilizing it.

Should you go away for a few days, clean the cage thoroughly before leaving, fill up water and food dishes, but **DON'T** leave any

Change the litter every week. If you use cedar shavings, change every 4 days.

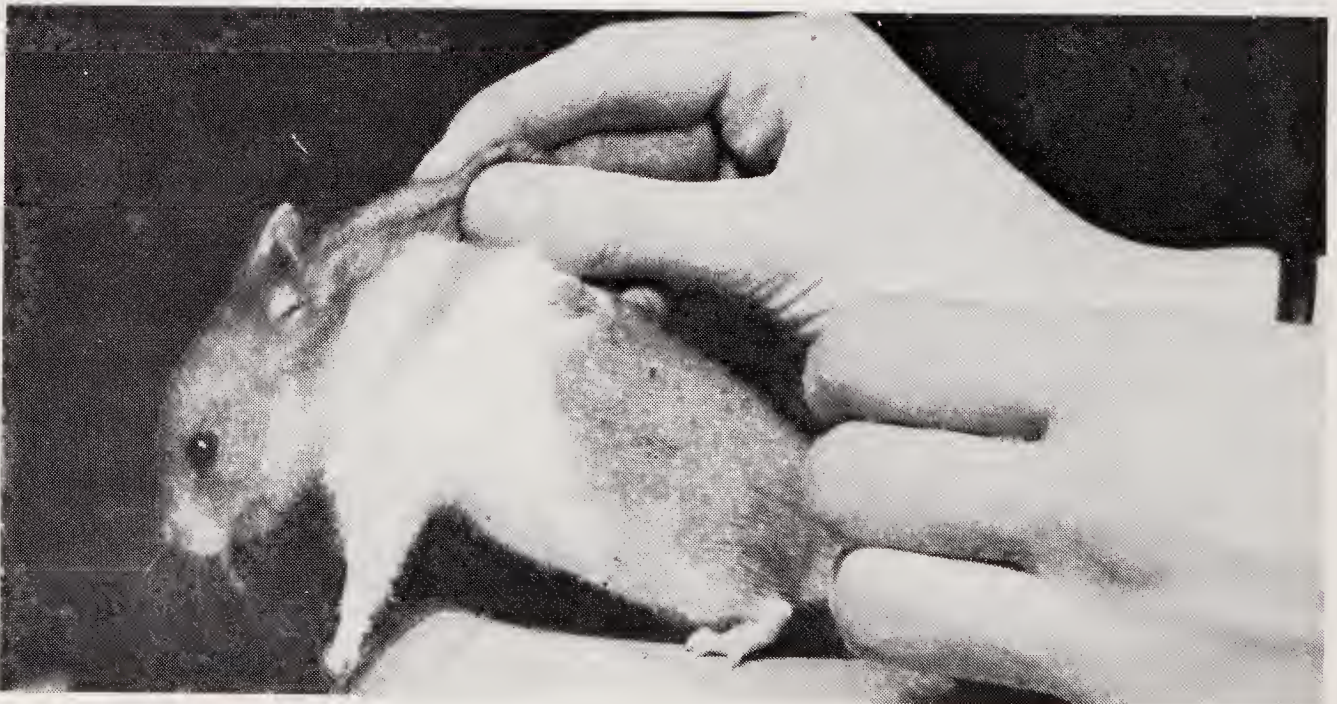




It is rare for hamsters to have fleas or ticks, but they should be sprayed regularly anyway, just to be sure!

excess of vegetables or fruits—your pet can exist nicely without them for a few days. You might check the hidden store and add a small portion of pellets for safety. Leave the cage partially covered across the back and one side, away from any draft, and you will know your pet will be in good shape when you return. If, however, you plan on being away more than three days, leave the hamster with your neighbor or possibly your pet shop would board him for you. Don't go away for a week and leave any pet without attention this length of time.

This is one way to pick up a hamster which may not be tame. You must hold the skin on the neck tight enough so the hamster can't turn his head to bite you.





You can begin to tame your pet hamster by offering food from a small container first, then from your hand.

TRAINING

The value of any pet is enhanced greatly if it can perform a few tricks. If you have the time and patience, your hamster can be trained to go through a few simple routines, but it will take time, patience and constant repetition.

Any pet that is suddenly taken from the family nest is excitable and frightened at first. But, given a few days to settle down, it becomes curious about the new home and environment and will shortly learn that the hand that moves into his cage is not an enemy but a source of food generally and a friend.

Even though this pet may have been bought for a child in the family, the child should be told that the little pet must not be roughly handled and that it must be regarded as a little friend that has rights of its own.

When the little pet is taken home, it should be placed in the prepared cage or a holding container for a few days, during which time it should not be handled. Even in placing food in the cage, care



Play with your hamster while it eats so it will get to know you and learn that you are its friend and can be trusted.

should be taken to prevent fright and this means slow and easy movements of your hand. These few days will give him the opportunity to look over his new home and owners, find out where the food and water are, and to set up a hiding place. The child should be encouraged to talk to the pet and to put in the food in the cage.

Training should not start until the hamster is at least three months old. The first step is to lightly touch the little body and get him accustomed to your hand. At first he may dash away and try to hide so don't chase him all over the cage with your hand. He may even squeal a bit with fright at first. After you can touch him without him darting away, change the touch to a soft stroke along the top of the body. This they seem to enjoy, so the next step will be to cup your hand over the body, at the same time stroking with your forefinger. Now, gently using thumb and first finger, gather the skin at the back of the neck or upper shoulder into a hold, at the same time bring the balance of your fingers under the body, the little finger across the rear. The hamster cannot go forward or backward but he may squirm and try to escape. Do not try to take him out of the cage until he

stops fighting you. This will take several days. As long as you fondle him in his cage, should he break out of your grasp for any reason, he cannot escape from the cage nor will he suffer a fall such as might occur if you were holding him outside the cage.

As soon as he allows you to hold him, gradually loosen your hold on his neck but allow your forefinger to encircle under his neck, and bring your thumb up over the neck itself, thus allowing only the head to show through these two fingers. The balance of your hand will still retain the rest of his body to prevent his backing away. Now you can take him out, but be alert, for he may give a sudden jerk and away he will go. It is quite a task to locate a six inch hamster under your furniture.

When this is accomplished, your hamster will be eager to get out by means of your hand and will come to you. For a little inducement put a bit of choice food on the palm of your hand and watch him. This is one reason keeping tasty treats only for rewards for training has been emphasized.

Allow the hamster to crawl up your arm to your shoulder, even

Pet and handle your hamster as frequently as possible. The more it is handled, the tamer it will be.





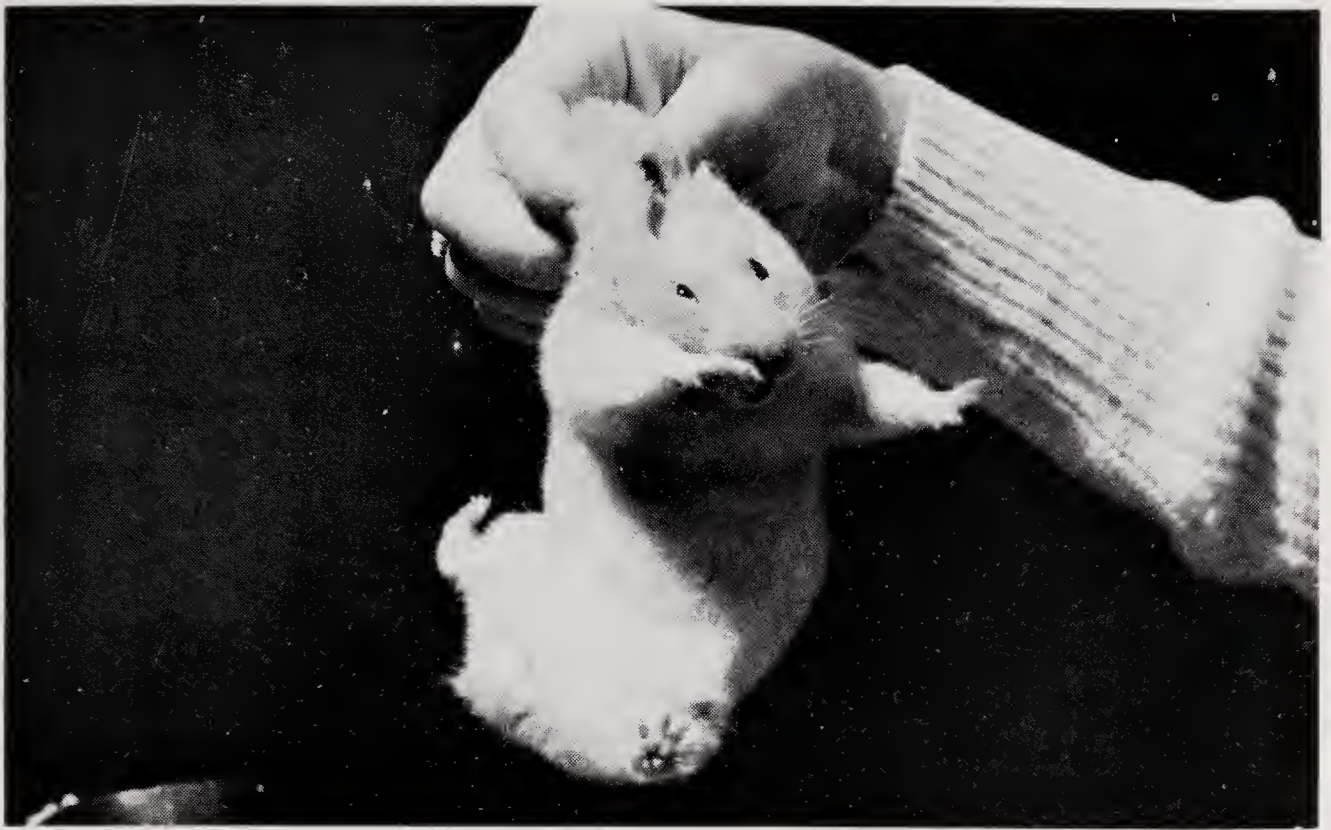
When hamsters are curious, they can stand on their two hind feet.

place him there. Again a tasty morsel may encourage him to make this trip on his own.

You might try also to get him to sit up. This is accomplished by using both hands, holding the hamster on the palm of one and a bit of food held between thumb and forefinger with the other. Hold the tidbit a little higher than his head and make him stretch to get it. Next day raise the food a bit more and soon he will be forced into sitting up to reach it. From then on keep the food high enough to make him sit up. To make this trick sound good, when an audience is present, talk to the hamster and tell him if he sits up he will get a reward, then hold up the food, and up he will go.

A word of caution here—*don't try to teach too many tricks at once*. It can't be done. Training is a matter of habit and repetition. When one trick is well done a couple of times then another can be started. While teaching the second trick don't neglect the first one as a few days' absence of a trick may make the hamster forget it. Training cannot be accomplished in a day, or a week—it takes infinite patience.

A trick that can be added later is getting him to hang by his hind feet to your fingers; another is climbing a tiny ladder (a parakeet ladder is good for this); turning in circles or 'waltzing.' This latter is not difficult. Put a choice morsel on end of a toothpick and hold it just out of reach beyond the head and bring it around the rear of the



This is the *wrong* way to pick up a hamster. You can tell that by the way the hamster is squirming.

animal, at the same time using your forefinger at the rear to gently shove him around. He will soon learn that this food must be chased around to get. At first if he just makes a part of a circle, give him the food and next day try to get the circle a little larger. In time, he will make a complete circle, then two, and then as many as it takes to catch the food.

Pick up your hamster this way if you know he is tame.





Your petshop, where you bought your hamster, is fully equipped to give you all of the essentials for a happy, healthy hamster. Rely on your petshop and if you have any problems, ask them . . . that's what they are in business for, to help you help your pet.

SELECTING A HAMSTER

If you are looking for a pet hamster, then most of the pet stores will handle a selection and can tell you if the one you select is male or female, if young or old, and can sell you the proper foods and equipment. Don't look for a bargain sale, runts, or take old animals! But how are you to know? First of all, patronize your local pet shop and ask help in selection. Your pet dealer realizes that if you are not satisfied, he may lose a good customer, so he will help you as much as he can. The only way to determine the age of a hamster, and this is not infallible, is to look at the ears of the animal you have selected. If the inside is naked and shiny, the animal is in its prime, maybe past, but if there are short white hairs inside the ears, then chances are you have a young animal. Look for dense and shiny fur, a good golden color running to a brownish tinge, look for bright eyes, and a solid body—if it appears on the bony side look at another hamster. If you are going to get but one hamster, it matters little if male or female, although there is a slight tendency to select a good male. One hamster is happy alone, being a solitary animal, except at breeding time. It is best to get one from one month to three months old, although a hamster is considered an adult at two months of age. Two males or two females may live happily together, and give pleasure in watching them scamper about and play, but a pair should



Hamsters require exercise and there is nothing better than a mechanical exercise wheel which gives each hamster as much of a workout as he desires.

only be housed together if breeding is desired.

Possibly an easy way of sexing hamsters of adult size is to look at the underside—if there are two rows of what appears dark dots then it is a female. Females also appear blunter at the tail area. For a pet, both male and female seem about the same. Do not worry about the sex. If you want to breed them, or have more than two in the same cage, then it becomes necessary to know the sex. Again you can rely upon the dealer to help you, or should you order through the mail, then you can designate what you wish.

A cage full of sleeping white hamsters, one atop the next.





This champagne colored mother hamster, left, with her two youngsters.

BREEDING

Presupposing you have purchased two hamsters and find they are a pair, and you wish them to breed, these few suggestions may be of help.

Gestation period is 16 days, the litter numbering from 2 to 12 young, and unless you are prepared to find homes for the young or can dispose of them through a dealer, you had better keep them separated. The female can have her first litter when she is eight weeks old, three weeks thereafter she is ready to breed again, so roughly speaking, every other month she can produce a litter. They, in turn, reach maturity shortly and in turn also give birth. A female can continue breeding for a matter of a year or so, with a life span of three years.

The young will need no special care but the mother and family should be left alone and not annoyed. The male, however, must be removed. During her gestation and for a week or so after birth, the mother should be given milk along with plenty of fresh vegetables

and fresh water. During this time she should not be taken from the cage.

The babies when born are a very light tan, very small, naked and blind. A few days later the fur starts growing. At two weeks of age, they are running around and eating solid foods. When they are a month old they must be separated, male from female, or they will breed.

Breeding usually occurs in the late evening if all is right, but if they fight, they must be separated. After breeding, they may remain together for a period of ten days but at that time the male should be removed, as the female is sensitive to any annoyance and may turn on her young.

It has been calculated that one female can breed, raise and produce 25 young in a six month period, the female young in turn breeding, so at the end of six months, there is about 500 young. Far too many to keep unless you are a breeder, too many to give away, and probably too many for your local pet shop to handle.

So—if you want a hamster as a pet, get just one or two of the same

Sometimes a pair of hamsters will use the same nest and snuggle very closely together. This is not part of the mating cycle as often two males or two females work the same nest together.





This is a pregnant female hamster. Note how huge she is.

sex and leave the breeding to breeders. Solitary animals make better pets and are tamer in general.

But should you discover that a pair that you bought as the same sex are of opposite sex and have mated, you had better prepare a nest for the female, or the material for her to do it. Paper shreddings mixed with dry grass is excellent. Give the cage a good cleaning, plenty of water and fresh vegetables and leave her alone. In an additional dish, give her fresh milk of room temperature. Avoid handling her or moving things in the cage during this period.

When born, hamsters have both eyes and ears closed, are a pink color without hair or fur, and weigh $\frac{1}{8}$ ounce. Fur will start to grow in a few days and by the time they are two weeks old, they will have a good coat. When they are 18 days old, they are weaned and ready to care for themselves.

After her young are born, even the tamest of hamster resents being disturbed and her natural instinct makes her suspicious of even her owner. Should it be necessary to move the mother and young, first take out the mother then the young and when the young are put

back, be sure they are in the identical spot. If frightened, the mother may scoop up the young in her pouch.

Often the hamster exhibits cannibalistic tendencies. This is a normal precaution should the young be ill.

AILMENTS AND TREATMENT

Luckily, the hamster has few ailments, none of them their own. Should you discover your pet huddles in the corner, refusing to eat, let him alone for a while, but if this behavior continues, then precautions should be taken.

The most common ailment of the hamster is the common cold, which may actually be caught from a human. If you or the members of your family have a cold, be extremely careful in handling the hamster, as he is susceptible to it. In fact the hamster will actually act just like a person with a cold—nasal discharge, sniffles, and the coat losing its shine. Cover part of his cage, give him plenty of fresh water

Teach your baby hamster to drink and eat by forcefully introducing its nose into the feed and water cups.



and vegetables and add a few drops of cod-liver oil on a tiny portion of stale bread and give it to him. During the course of a cold, do not handle your hamster or expect any tricks. Should you have more than one hamster, isolate the ailing one, as the cold is contagious. If you have just one hamster, after the cold has run its course, completely sterilize the cage and all contents of glass or china, throw away all remaining food, litter, and bedding given it, and start over with fresh items. This is also a good time to hang the cage in the sun.

Should the hamster suffer a cut or bruise, if he can reach it he will care for it himself, but if not, any mild antiseptic may be applied by putting cotton on the end of a match and gently swabbing the wound.

The hamster is subject to toothaches much as people but unless the offending tooth is loose or broken, a trip to a local veterinarian is best (although the tooth may be easily removed by using your finger tips).

DISPLAYS AND SHOWS

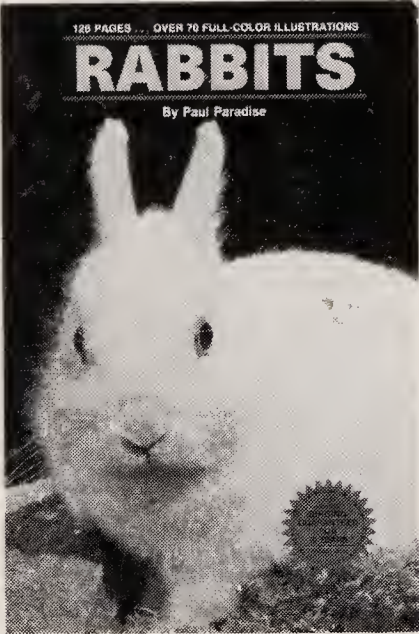
Some state fairs have hamster categories in their animal section, which are judged by prominent hamster judges. If you feel you have a fine animal, then by all means check with the fair and enter your pet.

There are also hamster societies, devoted to the advancement of the hobbyist, where you can gain information on your pet, make exchanges and see new methods of feeding or caring for them. Many local clubs have monthly or yearly displays. Your local pet shop can probably put you in touch with a group near to you.

SUMMARY

A lot of words have been written on the care of one small animal who asks little but clean and fresh food and housing conditions, not too much handling, a chance to show how smart he is and a lot of affection from his owners. His life span is two to three years, which is short-lived compared to some animals. If a child's pet, let the child know the hamster won't live as long as the pet dog or cat, and if he gets to be around three years old, he is a very old man of the hamster family. A child can grieve so at the loss of a pet it is often a good idea to replace one immediately to allow the new one to take over for the one that has passed on.

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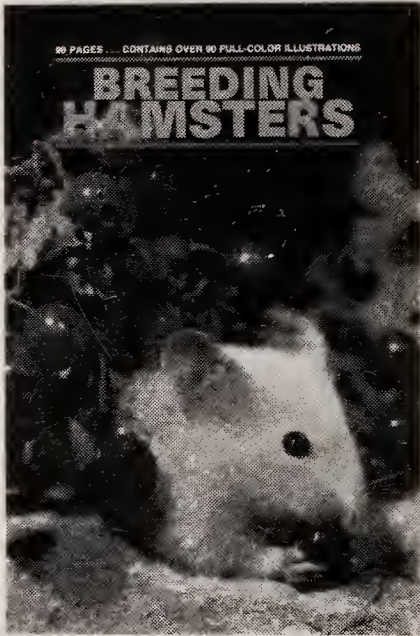


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